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PARIS FOR D'ELIA AND KANEDA

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SUBJECT: TOGO ELECTION UPDATE: SOFTWARE PROBLEMS JEOPARDIZE
VOTER REGISTRATION; ELECTORAL PROCESS TAKES A POLITICAL TURN

REF: LOME 0553

Classified By: Ambassador David B. Dunn, Reasons 1.4 B and D.

¶1. (C) Summary. The opening round of voter registration for Togo's upcoming legislative elections -- the centerpiece of the ongoing reform and reconciliation process -- have revealed a number of problems related to the registration software. Of particular concern to the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) and UN elections experts is the database that will generate a new national voter list. The UN experts (protect) attribute the problems to the Belgian company selected to develop the software for the registration. In a related development, CENI granted a three-day extension for voter registration in Lome and surrounding areas due to numerous problems that plagued voter registration in the heavily populated coastal region (ref). A march organized by opposition elements is scheduled for August 4 to protest shortcomings in the registration process. The demonstration could portend an end to the consensus among the major political parties that has guided the reform process. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On July 27, the heads of the five Lome-based missions (European Union, UNDP, France, Germany, U.S.) participating in the donor basket that supports the Togolese election process -- the PEACE project, toured CENI's newly-opened data processing center along with the president and vice president of CENI. Following the tour, the entire group met privately with Dunia Ramazani, the voter registration and IT expert on the PEACE technical team. Ramazani, a Canadian national of Congolese origin, is employed by UNDP.

¶3. (C) Ramazani delivered a litany of complaints about the performance of Zetes, the Belgian IT software development company hired by the GOT for the registration process. The choice of Zetes was based in part on the company's successful performance in last year's presidential election in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Earlier problems with Zetes in the design of the voter ID software caused numerous delays in voter registration, which in turn caused the election itself to be postponed from June 24 to August 5 and now indefinitely pending satisfactory progress on the creation of a voter list. Ramazani alleged that Zetes is no longer the company that managed the successful registration process in the DRC elections. He said that a bitter internal dispute over the sharing of profits from the DRC contract has caused Zetes to split, with most of the technical experts leaving to form

another company.

¶4. (SBU) The evening of July 30, PEACE project donors met with senior CENI officials and representatives of Zetes in an attempt to clear the air. Though defensive, the Zetes reps agreed to follow up with CENI and the PEACE team to try and resolve the underlying problems. The entire group met again on August 2 at the CENI data processing center.

¶5. (C) Based on the arguments of the two sides during the meeting and information gathered in earlier briefings, The problem boils down to a lack of confidence on the part of CENI (and its UN advisors) in Zetes' ability to deliver robust voter list software that will withstand the scrutiny of international observers and opposition members as regards anti-fraud safeguards. This lack of confidence is based on two factors - problems associated with the development of the voter ID software by Zetes earlier this year and the unwillingness and/or inability of Zetes to share the codes for the software being developed that would allow CENI to analyze for itself the quality of the safeguards. The voter ID software developed by Zetes was eventually perfected, but not until after a long, iterative process involving Zetes and CENI. Based on that experience, CENI is reluctant to recommend an election date to the government without a firm idea of whether and when a satisfactory voter list can be produced.

¶6. (SBU) The meeting produced a pledge by Zetes to sit down with CENI and the PEACE technical team and share additional technical information. Although the meeting and pledge represented a step forward, it was unclear to the heads of mission present whether this would be sufficient to resolve the underlying problem and break the impasse. CENI is to

report back to the donors on August 6.

¶7. (U) The three day extension of voter registration in Lome and surrounding areas ended on August 1 and was extended to the morning of August 3 for anyone who had missed the opportunity. The extension, granted because logistical problems in Lome had prevented many voters from meeting the scheduled July 29 deadline (ref), has been controversial. Some supporters of the traditional opposition, mainly from the UFC, have argued that it should have been longer, while some in the RPT have argued that it should not have occurred at all. Registration in the rest of the country that took part in round one (Zone A) was uneventful and closed as scheduled on July 29. Registration in the second half of the country, Zone B, is scheduled to begin on Monday, August 6, and run for two weeks.

¶8. (C) The UFC and several smaller associated parties have scheduled a march on August 4 that coincides with a visit to Togo by UFC president Gilchrist Olympio. A major theme of the march is the flawed CENI-organized registration process, which is labeled a "masquerade" in fliers advertising the event -- even though the UFC is a member of CENI. Partially in response, the prime minister's office issued a communique on August 3 noting that a tripartite meeting of the government, CENI (including a UFC representative), and the donors had expressed satisfaction with the conclusion of the registration in Zone A. Rumors are circulating in Lome on August 3 that the RPT may be planning a counter-demonstration, also on August 4, that would cross paths with the UFC march.

¶8. (C) Comment. Although the registration process has been flawed, CENI and the GOT were able to take and publicize corrective actions sufficiently to earn a passing grade for the first round, during which more than half of the electorate were registered. Unresolved issues involving software for the voter list are more serious and will require a meeting of the minds between CENI and its Belgian supplier that has eluded the two parties up to now. More worrisome still is the politicization of the electoral process, in the form of the demonstration and possible counter-demonstration scheduled for this weekend. A violent outcome to the

demonstration(s) would be a harsh blow to a reform process that has been able to weather a number of lesser storms thus far, as would further politicization of the process leading to repudiation and/or withdrawal by the UFC. End Comment.

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